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I was never bugged, says Harold Wilson

'Reports incredible: I demand inquiry

By Sunday Times Reporters

SIR HAROLD WILSON last night called for an inquiry into reports that his study at No. 10 Downing Street and his room at the Commons had been bugged by our own security services. He ridiculed the idea, first reported in the Daily Express.

Sir Harold said nothing about his alleged suspicions of MI5. A Sunday Times inquiry (page 3) has, however, established that:

1 Sir Harold did indeed find a hole in the wall behind a Gladstone painting in his study.

2 He did express to his aides the suspicion that a metal device in the hole was something to do with bugging.

3 He did say he would call in experts to check the hole.

Sir Harold Wilson, in his exclusive statement to the Press Association, said: "The reports in the Daily Express of yesterday and today I find incredible. Had this electronic surveillance been in force, I should have known. At no time were there any serious suggestions that this was happening."

"Neither the Home Secretary, nor the head of the security service—or for that matter any of his very responsible officers—would have considered such action for one moment. If anyone at a lower level had sought to engage in a private enterprise operation it would have been known."

"It would have been illegal and unconstitutional; moreover any interference, such as that suggested, with any MP's phone would have been a clear breach of Parliamentary privilege."

"Yesterday, the Prime Minister rightly asked that anyone with hard information about such alleged operations should report it to the Home Secretary for investigation. Since I have never had reason even to suspect that these activities were going on, I have no such information to lay before him. But I shall be happy to have an early discussion with him on the issues raised. Clearly, allegations such as these in Friday's and Saturday's papers must be investigated."

"Mr Chapman Pincher I long been known to have in close contact with certain of the officers of the security service, and I have known him well enough to be sure that whatever his sources—right or wrong—he would not print such a story if he did not believe it."

"Since contrary to everything known to me and my Number 10 and Cabinet Office advisers, I am confident of his facts, it is essential that the information in his possession must be made available to, and fully investigated by, the Home Secretary."

THERE are four possible answers to the conundrum of Harold Wilson and the alleged bugging of his studies at Number Ten and the House of Commons. One answer is that Wilson, under the strain of office, lapsed into a state approaching paranoia, and the eavesdropping existed only in his imagination.

The second is that the Director General of the Security Service, Sir Michael Hanley, did sanction the bugging of the Prime Minister, a step so extraordinary that only the most pressing evidence could have warranted it.

The third explanation is that Wilson was indeed bugged by members of one of the several British agencies capable of mounting such surveillance, but that it was an unauthorised operation. Finally, it is possible that Wilson was bugged—but by the Soviet KGB, which means there was a catastrophe.

The first two of those explanations—that Wilson's judgment became unbalanced; or that the Security Service did bug him—are not mutually exclusive, of course. But they are distinct; and unless the distinction is kept in mind, it is impossible to sift the allegations that have emerged so far.

Because the allegations themselves fall into two parts, Harold Wilson himself has asserted that he came to believe not only that the Security Service was incompetent, but that a faction within it was conspiring against him and his closest entourage.

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